

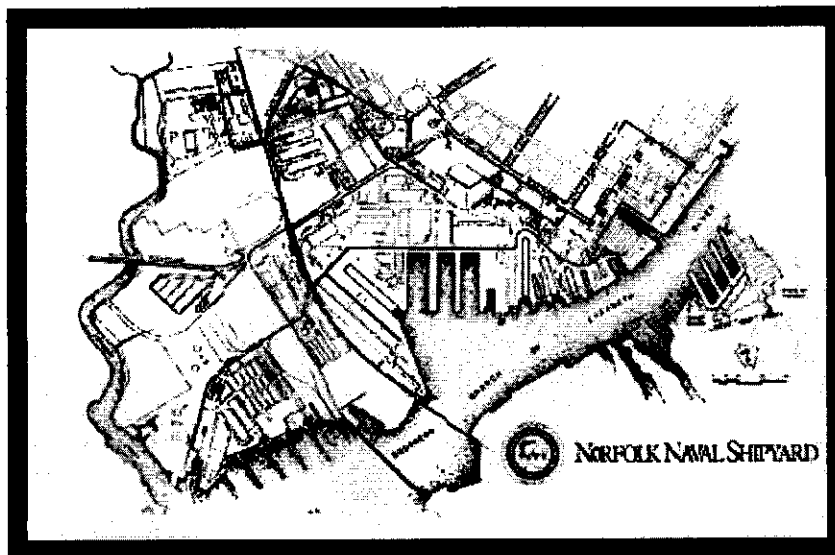
NNSY History



230 Years of Excellence

On November 1, 1767 Andrew Sprowle, a merchant and ship owner, established the Gosport Shipyard on the western shore of the Elizabeth River under the British flag. The shipyard developed and prospered as both a naval and merchant shipyard. When the American Revolution began in 1775, Sprowle chose to remain loyal to the Crown and fled the area aboard the Royal Governor's flagship. All his properties were confiscated by the Colony of Virginia. While being operated by Virginia, in 1779, the shipyard was burned by the British.

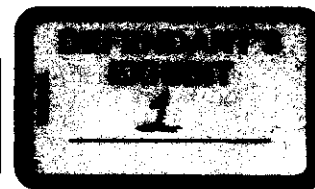
This former colonial shipyard became the Navy's nucleus in the Hampton Roads area where the largest naval base in the world has developed. The Norfolk Naval Shipyard is the U.S. Navy's oldest shipyard and actually predates the United States Navy Department by 31 years. The largest shipyard on the East Coast. Known for most of its first century as "Gosport", it was renamed "Norfolk" in 1862 after the largest city in the area. It has never borne the name of its home city of Portsmouth.



During its more than 230 years, the Norfolk Naval Shipyard has assisted the nation in winning nine major wars, putting an end to piracy, sending the Great White Fleet around the world, scientifically exploring the Pacific, and opening Japan to American trade.

Built here in 1794-99 was the U.S. frigate **USS CHESAPEAKE**, a sister ship of the **USS CONSTITUTION** and one of the first six ships to be built for the U.S. Navy after the Revolution. One hundred more ships slid down the ways here before the yard completed its last ship, a wooden minesweeper, in 1953.

The first dry dock in the western hemisphere opened here on June 17, 1833 by hosting the 74-gun ship-of-the-line **USS DELAWARE**. Dry Dock 1, now a national historic landmark, is still in use.



It was in this yard that the partly burned steam frigate USS MERRIMACK was converted by the Confederates into the CSS VIRGINIA. In March 1862, world wide attention focused on the battles between the VIRGINIA and the wooden Union ships USS CONGRESS and USS CUMBERLAND and the federal ironclad USS MONITOR. The battles in Hampton Roads spurred changes in naval technology around the world.

USS TEXAS, first U.S. naval battleship to be commissioned, was built here in 1889-92 as was USS RALEIGH, the first modern cruiser completely built by the government.

Flying from the first flight deck built on a ship, by the Norfolk Naval Shipyard, Eugene B. Ely took off from USS BIRMINGHAM (CS-2) in Hampton Roads on November 14, 1910. Scheduled to land at NNSY, he touched down instead in Norfolk.

The first aircraft carrier in the U.S. Navy's history, the USS LANGLEY, was converted here between 1919 and 1922 from the collier USS JUPITER.

The yard's employment peak of nearly 43,000 workers was reached during World War II when the yard built nearly 30 major vessels and repaired 6,850 U.S. and Allied ships. It also built 20 tank landing ships and 50 medium landing craft.

During the three years of the Korean War, the shipyard completed work on more than 1,250 naval vessels and built two wooden minesweepers.

The shipyard attained nuclear technology capability in the early part of 1965 when USS SKATE (SSN-578) became the first modern submarine to undergo a major overhaul here.

Shipyards here have built a tradition of professional leadership through hard work and technological innovation. As sailing ships yielded to steam-powered ironclads, they learned new skills. From the early experiments with Polaris missiles to the latest installation of complex weapons systems, shipyarders have come up with productive ways to get their jobs done. That is why today Norfolk Naval Shipyard's ability to repair and overhaul ships with speed and efficiency has earned it numerous awards and the reputation of being the nation's number one shipyard.

Other historical areas of interest

- **Former Shipyard Commanders**
- **Norfolk Naval Shipyard Roots**